

May the 4th be with you, 2020

Trinity Musings #12: Rev Brian Goodings (self-isolating in my office at Trinity United Church: Collingwood)

(Warning: beware of strong language and hints of clergy-violence)

I know, as a clergyperson, I'm supposed to practice love and kindness in all I say and do (except in front of the hockey net of course)...but, forgive me my angry outburst...I'd like to kick that CREEP who hacked my email on Friday in you-know-where.

"P", ostensibly, sent an email out to all my contacts asking for financial help in an urgent hospital matter. The scammer said there was someone undergoing critical surgery who needed our help, immediately.

This isn't the first time this has happened and I know of at least two people who believed it really was me and responded by trying to send "me" the help I requested. Fortunately, in both of these cases that, the people discovered the ruse before sending the money. However, there may well be others that I don't know, who did. If they did, I probably never will find out because good-hearted people are embarrassed to admit they fell for a scam.

Betrayal of innocence and trust consistently results in the victim of the crime holding the nasty-secret privately. They mistakenly believe it was their fault and should have known better. Shame is held in deep silence.

These scam artists target churches, like ours, and prey upon the trust the congregants have for each other and the minister. In both cases I know, the scammer entered into an email dialogue with the unsuspecting congregant and used churchy language. They asked for urgent prayers to be sent along with the money and really played up the fake story. Pretty slick and sick.

The worst part of these scams is that every time they happen, some of our collective innocence is lost and the world seems more like an untrustworthy place. They contribute to the possibility our senses and even our best intuitions are not as they seem. We all shrink in confidence after we have been duped and our trust for everything is damaged and diminished. We're unsure about what we thought was reality. Conspiracy theories can thrive and grow in us when we start to go down this path of unease.

Maybe the moon landing really was faked; why would the flag move if there was no atmosphere? Maybe JFK was really executed by the CIA...Mafia...Fidel Castro...all of them? Maybe the Twin Towers that fell on 9/11 were rigged with explosives placed inside the structures by the CIA? Maybe the ghost of Harold Ballard really does haunt the Leafs?

Over the years, a few scam artists have tricked me but I choose not to live with an overarching suspicion of the world. Most conspiracy theories take far too much time and energy for me to explore and I know people who are consumed with them-almost to the exclusion of everything else. They tend to be, at best, boring conversationalists who want to prove everything is fake using half-baked-facts and information they heard on Fox News. Now there's a network for whackos.

Granted, my eyes have been opened quite significantly by the disclosures of Julian Assange and Edward Snowden. Turns out even supposedly good guys like Barack Obama and Mark Zuckerberg really do have a strong Big-Brotherish interest and influence on our lives. I accept this as likely, and good to know, but it doesn't send me running to join a survivalist movement. I trust my neighbours and, for the most part, the world around me as essentially filled with honest and trustworthy people. I do not want to live with bitterness and deep cynicism.

The basis of my trust and practice is from Matthew 10: 16 (yep, Bible stuff). Jesus sent his disciples to the world with the warning they were to be as sheep in a world of wolves and they were to be as wise as snakes but as innocent as doves. His Godly-agenda was to eradicate the meanness of the world, not with strength and violence, but with vulnerability and love.

I understand this as an honest warning to any who choose to live their lives lovingly and with a trusting spirit. There may be times when the wolves of the world will take advantage of your meekness and trust, but that says more about them than you. Be careful to manage your vulnerability but sometimes you may even risk it. And understand, that falling prey to tricksters because you trusted them, is the better, but sometimes-costly choice. So be it. More often than not, I have found the world to be a pretty trustworthy place and I expect most of you have too. Don't let any scam artists steal hope and trust from us. That would truly be the greatest loss of all.

The next time I send you an email asking for help, you will know it's legitimately me if I ask for a small bag of unmarked bills. Other than that, I will never send you an email asking for financial help in any emergency. Trust me...lol!

